

RITUAL STRUCTURE

771 of Jalal Miyan or by one of the goddesses. Going into a trance
 796 these people speak for the spirit which possesses them. The other
 787 people who are present there make offerings to them, seek solu-
 tions of their pressing problems and difficulties, and request them
 to remedy their ills and worries. Considerable enthusiasm is in
 evidence among them at this time. With these exceptions there is
 very little religious thought, talk or worship in normal life.

779 However, both Hindus and Muslims have a degree of fatalism
 • 777 and demonstrate a spirit of resignation towards predestined facts
 775 ordained for them by the supernatural forces of the world beyond.
 People can often be heard to remark, 'If it is written in our fate,
 we must submit to it. Human effort cannot alter the will of God.
 What is predestined must have its course.' But this fatalism makes
 its appearance only when the people have tried their best to solve
 the problem and having spared no effort still find themselves no
 nearer a solution. Coupled with this concept of fate is the Hindu
 doctrine of *karma*. According to this concept, which takes for
 granted the phenomenon of the transmigration of the soul and its
 re-birth, our actions in the past life determine the character of our
 present life, and our actions in this life will determine the character
 of our future life. The village people clearly reconcile and synthe-
 size these two views into a practical precept: the course of our
 present life is largely predestined on the basis of our acts in the
 past life, but by acting 'rightly' in this life we can materially
 influence the course of our life after death.

779 The rural ethic lays great emphasis on 'acting rightly', that is
 775 on the observance of traditional norms; because it is the only way
 772 to achieve happiness and prosperity in this life, and more than
 that to ensure the destiny of the soul after death. The problem of
 the future plays a very significant part in the ordering of life.
 Both Hindus and Muslims believe that death is not the end; there
 is something beyond it. Both attach great importance to the destiny
 of the soul after death. While the Muslim expects to remain in his
 grave until the Resurrection, when on the Day of Judgement he
 will be assigned to heaven (*jannat*) or hell (*jahannum*) according to
 his deeds, for the Hindu life is practically an unending process.
 After death one either goes to heaven (*swarga*) or to hell (*narka*), or
 one takes re-birth. Depending on one's actions in the past life,
 one may be born into one of the castes higher or lower than one's
 caste in the previous life, or even into some other lower species

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5. RELIGION IN DISEASE AND DIFFICULTY

In the two preceding sections an attempt has been made to 771
present the ritual cycle of the community covering firstly the
festivals and ceremonies within a normal calendar year, and
secondly, the rites and observances concerning the major crises
of life. These cycles are rigidly observed, as their observance
constitutes the *dharma* or the appropriate way of life, and leads to
the prosperity and well-being of the family as well as to a desir-
able future for the individual after death. With the exception of
these festivals, under normal conditions of life, there is very little
spiritual or devotional activity in the community. But persistent
difficulties, uncommon diseases, and frequent deaths turn the
people's thoughts to supernatural factors; events are interpreted
in terms of supernatural interferences, and are sought to be reme-
died by magico-religious procedures.

Most of the common diseases are interpreted as a 'fault in the 753
physical system', and are treated with herbal medicines or modern 757
drugs obtained from the dispensary. Common colds, headaches, 755
fever, stomach-ache, scabies, gonorrhoea and syphilis are regarded
as natural diseases, and an effort is made to cure them with
medicines. But persistent headaches, intermittent fevers, continued
stomach disorders, rickets and other wasting diseases among chil-
dren, menstrual troubles, repeated abortions, etc., are attributed
to supernatural forces. In all such cases medicinal cures as well as
propitiation of the 'unseen powers' are attempted simultaneously.
Similarly, such calamities as the failure of crops, total blindness, [772]•
repeated failures in undertakings, deaths of children in quick
succession and too many deaths in the family within a short time
are taken to indicate 'misfortune' and 'the handiwork of malevo-
lent supernatural forces'. Smallpox, cholera and plague are always
attributed to the wrath of various goddesses. For these diseases
worship is regarded as the only remedy; and no medicines are
administered to the patients.

What are the major factors that cause these difficulties, distresses 753
and deaths? In the village community they are attributed to one 761
or more of the following:

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| (i) The wrath of ancestor-spirits. | (ii) Unfavourable stars. |
| (iii) Ghosts and spirits. | (iv) The wrath of gods. |
| (v) Black magic and witchcraft. | |